



Summer smells

Understanding experience through the sense of smell

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Landscape Environment Advancement Foundation, LEAF

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Smell and the city

Odor: “An odor or odour (commonly referred to as a smell) is caused by one or more volatilized chemical compounds, generally at a very low concentration, that humans or other animals perceive by the sense of olfaction.” (www.wikipedia.com)

The ability of humans and other animals to perceive odor is known as smell.

The olfactory system, which senses odour, is important to our lives, and comprises one of the most primary parts of the brain. Clues that the smells send to our brains come in the form of chemicals found in the surrounding environment. The sense of smell is a sense that is often underrated but works overtime. You are, all the time, unconsciously reacting to different smells.

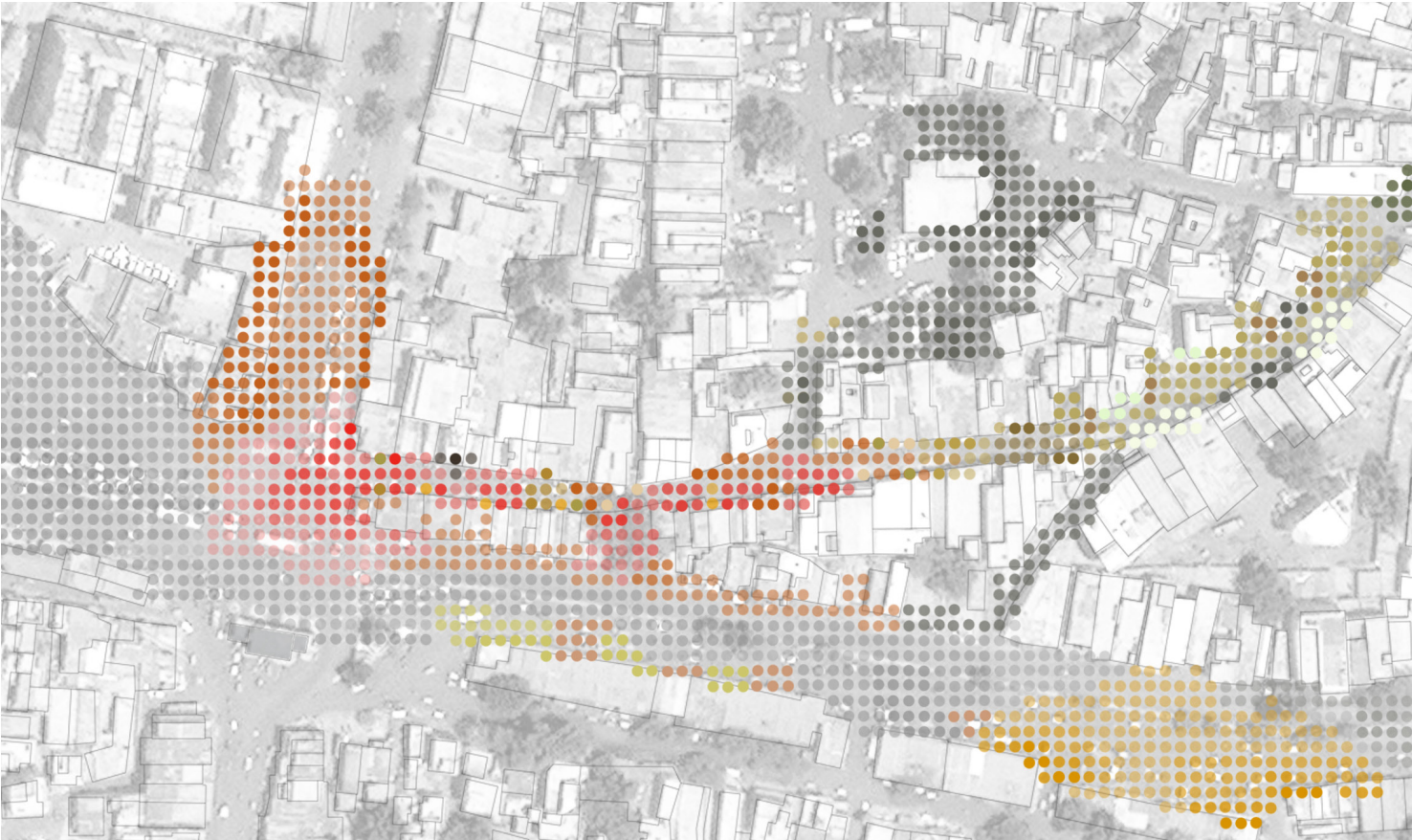
Our lives are not ruled by the sense of smell only. However, consciously or subconsciously, it plays a very important part in our daily lives. Human beings can identify up to thousand different odours but not everybody can recognize them to the same degree. Our expressions, emotions directly relate to this sense. Environmental odours can affect mood and stress levels. Our sense of smell not only provides us with warnings about the environment, but also plays an important role in how we recognize each other, communicate with each other, and recall memory. Aroma also plays an important role in our social and cultural life. The use of fragrance in various rituals, cooking and other activities has become an inextricable part of daily life such that, knowingly or unknowingly various odours have also made their place in our existence.

“When from a long distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, taste and smell alone, more fragile but enduring, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, remain poised a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unflinchingly, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.” - Marcel Proust

Places have distinctive smells too. This is expressed very well in the blog; www.tangdynastytimes.com, by Peony. Quoting Mahmoud Darwish, *“Acre is the smell of iodine and spices. Haifa is the smell of pine and wrinkled sheets. Moscow is the smell of vodka on ice. Cairo is the smell of mango and ginger. Beirut is the smell of the sun, sea, smoke, and lemons. Paris is the smell of fresh bread, cheese, and derivations of enchantment. Damascus is the smell of jasmine and dried fruit. Tunis is the smell of night musk and salt. Rabat is the smell of henna, incense, and honey. A city that cannot be known by its smell is unreliable. Exiles have a shared smell: the smell of longing for something else; a smell that resembles another smell. A panting, nostalgic smell that guides you, like a worn tourist map, to the smell of the original place.”* Peony goes on to say that, *“Many cities in the world have distinctive smells even today but many of them are a perception of the mind. For example, Venice smells swampy and sweaty and you notice it the minute you arrive; Bali is overwhelmingly like heavenly frangipani and temple incense; each has their own beautiful colors and culture; their own spirit and fragrances. Cityscapes like landscapes attain a particular atmosphere to which those who live in become attuned. It is this spirit, which enables people to say that great cities are all more than just the sum total of their parts.”*

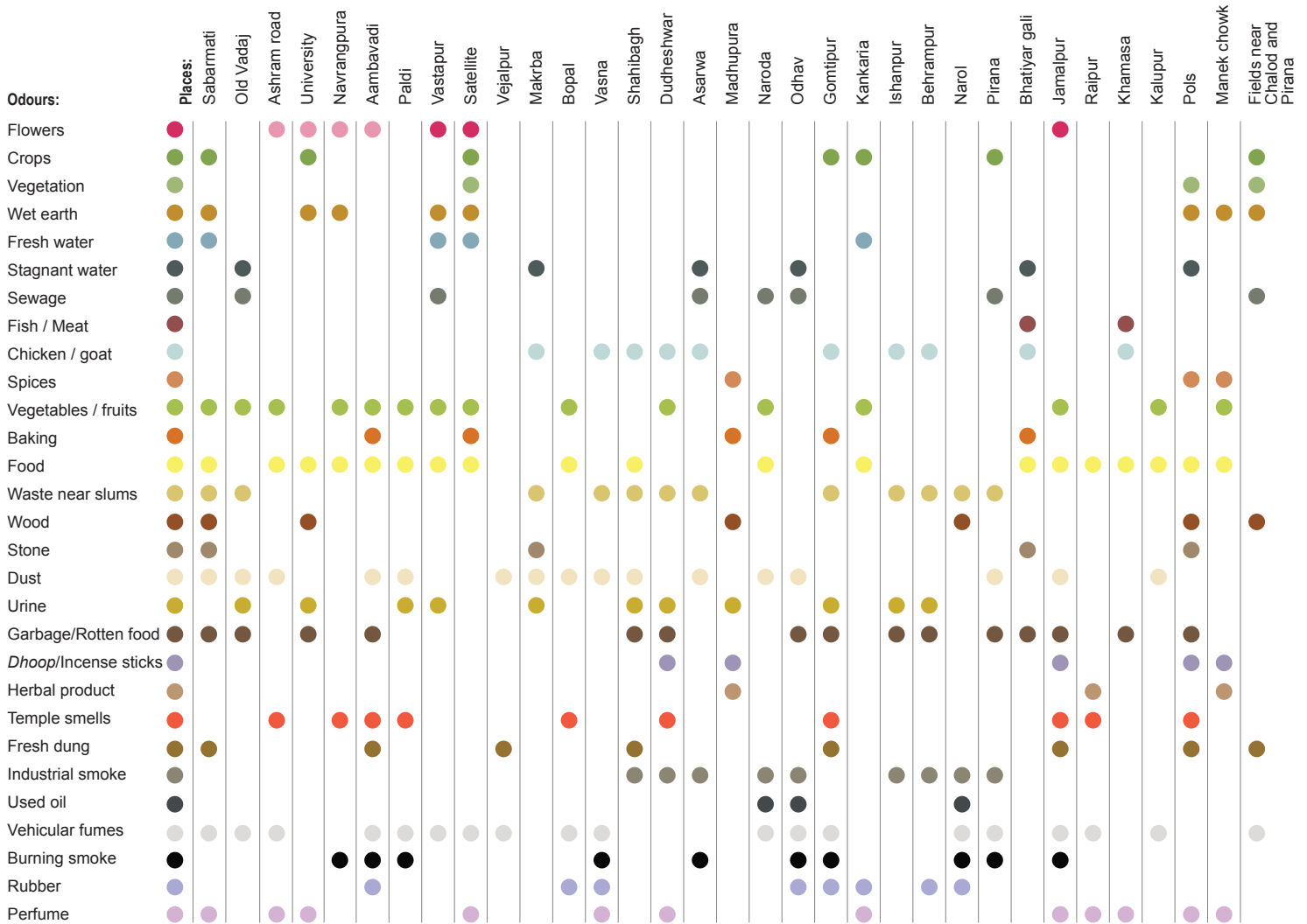
For this document, I chose to investigate the layers of smells of Ahmedabad where I live and study. Ahmedabad is one of the largest and fastest growing cities in India. As in the case of a developing city, the smells of gasoline, vehicular & industrial fumes are a majority in the atmosphere. But under this layer of grey, lies a mosaic of other characters.

Odour map, Madhupura spices and grain market

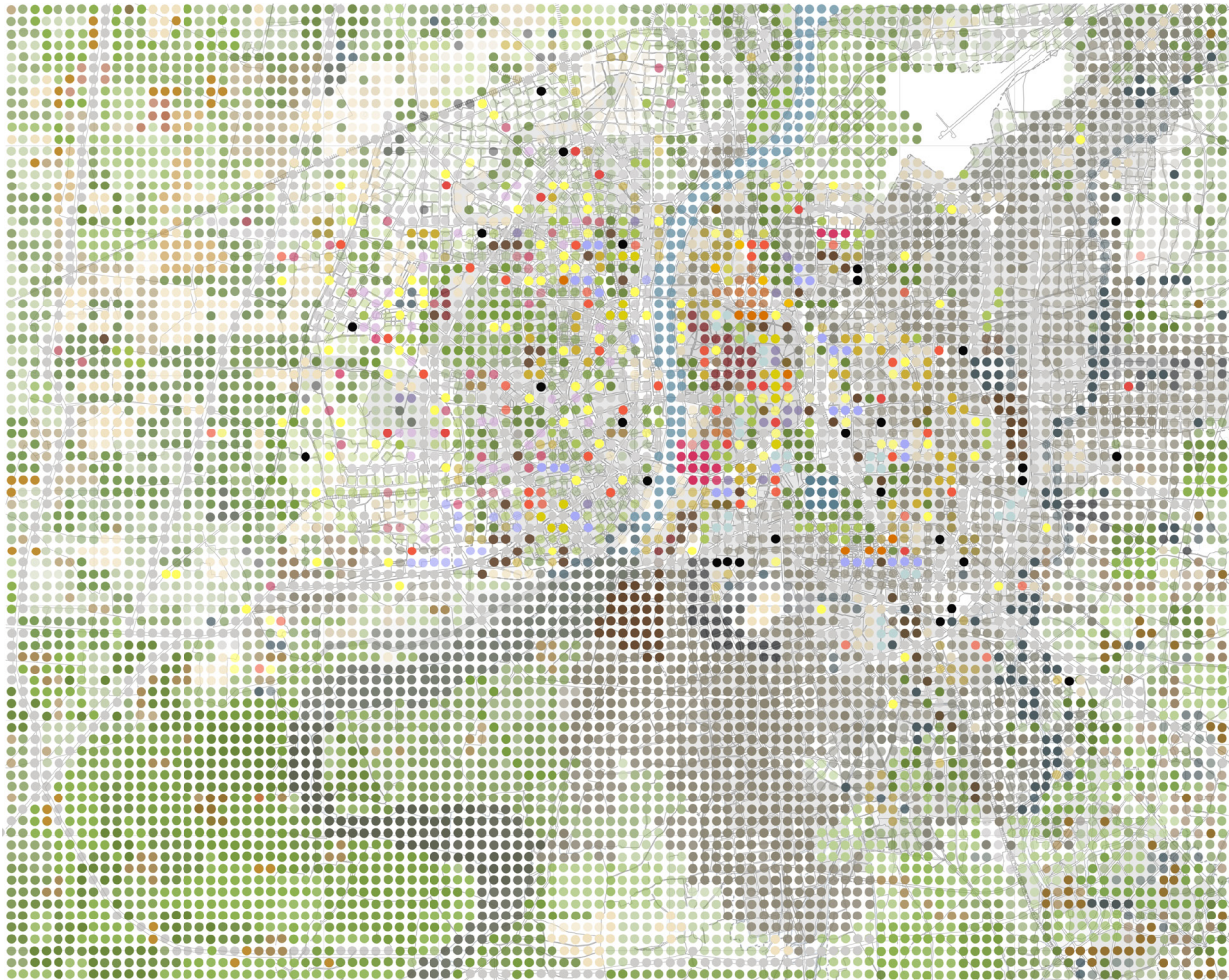


Observation time 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. & 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Place and smell perception



Odour map of the city



NOTE: Based on observations for this document this map has been generated as a hypothetical exercise. Each coloured dot is based on the legend shown on the facing page.





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